

4-1-1962

# Other Foreigners

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## Recommended Citation

Calkin, Homer L. "Other Foreigners." *The Palimpsest* 43 (1962), 179-187.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol43/iss4/7>

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## Other Foreigners

The first of the white settlers in Iowa was a French Canadian. In 1788 Julien Dubuque obtained permission to work the lead mines around present-day Dubuque from the Fox Indians. This right was confirmed in a Spanish Land Grant in 1796. Louis Honore Tesson received a Spanish Land Grant near the present site of Montrose in Lee County in 1799 and Basil Giard was awarded a similar tract in what is now Clayton County opposite Prairie du Chien in 1800.

Nicolas Boilvin, another Frenchman, was interpreter to the Osage Indians as early as 1804 and later an Assistant Indian Agent for those tribes along the Mississippi River above the mouth of the Missouri River. In western Iowa Peter A. Sarpy, a French trader, built a trading post within the area of the present Pottawattamie County in 1824.

In spite of this early beginning few Frenchmen came to Iowa. The most notable settlement was the Icarian community in Adams County. The Iowa colony under the leadership of Etienne Cabet was started in 1858 when factions developed among the Icarians at Nauvoo, Illinois. It was made up of "people seeking release from the



religious and economic tyranny of revolutionary Europe. Revolting against oppression in the home land, these people came from socially disturbed France, from religiously torn Germany, and from politically unsettled Hungary." After twenty years the colony was dissolved by court order and the property divided between two factions.

Among the French in Iowa were many whose occupations were closely associated with early pioneer life. For instance, there was Louis Wise, a peddler in Ringgold County, George Wagner, a plowmaker in Bellevue, and Joseph Vilondre, John Gardfee and Louis Chairmon, Indian traders who lived in Fremont County in 1860. Other Frenchmen were saddlers, saloon keepers, carriage makers, marble cutters and gardeners.

#### *Dutch*

Although the Dutch have been closely associated with Iowa for a long time — particularly at Pella and Orange City — they as a whole, like the Danes, were slower to arrive and settle in Iowa. In 1950 they were the fourth largest group in Iowa. The man who led the Dutch to Iowa was Henry P. Scholte, who said he settled the fertile prairieland because he was "convinced that the settlement in some healthful region will have, by the ordinary blessing of God, excellent temporal and moral results, especially for the rising generations."

Scholte had secured title to 18,000 acres of land



in Marion County where he and 600 followers laid out the town of Pella in 1847. Soon frame buildings superseded dugouts and sod houses and their Iowa cheese acquired an excellent reputation in the markets of St. Louis. Truck gardening was followed more extensively than the tilling of large farms of corn or wheat.

In forming the Dutch colony at Pella, one of the principal reasons for leaving home had been religious persecution. A few years later an unusual assist came from Nicholas Anslyn who had been the Netherlands Consul at Keokuk in 1858 and 1859. After serving as commercial representative of the Government of Holland, Anslyn returned home to "use his influence . . . there to induce emigrants to come to this State [Iowa]." Anslyn had found the Hollanders in Iowa to be "an industrious and intelligent class of people" but few of them were "men of means." He expected to induce men of capital to emigrate "by proper presentations of the mercantile and agricultural facilities which will be afforded them in Iowa."

Pella was the source of settlers for other areas. In 1867 Jerry Pelmulder went with others to found Orange City. There they were joined by Dutchmen from Wisconsin. By 1874 this later colony was well established and had its own newspaper, *De Volksvriend*, published by Henry Hospers, a Pella founder who often contributed his efforts to encourage Dutch emigration.



*Hungarians*

One of the most dramatic reasons for emigrating was that of General Ladislaus Ujhazy and his band of Hungarians. In the Revolution of 1848 they were forced by the Russians to capitulate and surrender the Fortress of Comorn. They were allowed to emigrate without their property.

Prior to leaving New York for Iowa, General Ujhazy said: "To these shores I was driven by tyranny; to the fields of the west I am now borne by the desire of winning from mother Earth what is so necessary to the American Republic, a free and independent existence."

Upon their arrival at Burlington in 1850 Mayor H. W. Starr welcomed the Hungarians: "I only express the common sentiment of our people when I say you are welcome to Iowa — as citizens. . . . Her free soil is open to you and all your compatriots, and we are proud to number you among our people." To which Ujhazy replied,

We had an opportunity to choose our home out of the thirty stars which illuminate the firmament of American freedom. Our views were directed to the great West, and in the West to the youthful State of Iowa, where a truly republican and virtuous people are rapidly growing to wealth and power, and where nature by a most fertile soil, so lavishly aids the laboring man.

Among this band were Francis Varga, who was to hold public office in Iowa, and George Pomutz, who was an ardent promoter of New Buda,



their settlement in Decatur County. Later Pomutz served in the Civil War and became Consul General to Russia.

Just as Ujhazy, George Pomutz, Ferdinand Takacs and others fled Hungary during the Revolution of 1848 so did many twentieth century Hungarians. Following the October, 1956, revolt against the Communists, approximately 26,000 Hungarians were admitted to the United States. Of these, several scores followed the path which those a century earlier had taken to Iowa. In 1959 some 120 recent arrivals were reported.

#### *Bohemians*

The first impetus to migration of Bohemians or Czechs also came with the failure of the Revolution of 1848. The second cause was economic with America offering opportunities for land and other gains impossible at home.

The first permanent settlement of Bohemians was in Jefferson Township, Johnson County, and the southern part of Linn County, most coming in 1854 to 1856, but stragglers followed for a number of years. Cedar Rapids was the goal of many others when they arrived in New York. By 1856 at least 129 had arrived. Other Bohemian communities were established at Spillville, as well as in Benton, Tama, and Ringgold counties.

#### *Swiss*

Sometimes a single person did much to get his compatriots to emigrate. Chris Bathman was a



Swiss barber in Des Moines with one of the "best tonsorial divans between the two oceans." He constantly sent Iowa German language newspapers to Switzerland. As a result, he received numerous letters in the spring of 1869 saying that several dozen Swiss were coming to Iowa that year. These Swiss included house and sign painters, bookbinders, brewers and coppersmiths.

As was true on a national scope, the twentieth century in Iowa was marked by a swing of immigration from the British Isles and Western Europe to eastern and southern European countries. As a result, the Greeks, Italians, Russians, Poles and Yugoslavs began to arrive.

As early as 1850, however, at least one Italian was present in Iowa. He was Domenico Ballo, a music teacher in Council Bluffs. In 1860 there were still only thirty Italians, and they were living in scattered communities. Among them was Peter Pillezzaro of Dubuque County who followed a traditional Italian occupation, tending a vineyard.

Italian laborers were being told in 1862 that there were four conditions which would lead to prosperity in America. These were liberal wages, free schools, cheap land and cheap bread. Gradually such arguments became effective. By 1920 Italians were the largest foreign-born group in Appanoose and Dallas counties. They were also present in large numbers in Monroe, Webster, Polk, Pottawattamie and Woodbury counties.



In 1860 only a single Greek was reported as living in Iowa. In 1920 they were the third largest group in Cerro Gordo County with 430 being listed in the census. Woodbury County had 531 Greeks that year, the most of any Iowa county. Other counties with more than two hundred were Linn, Black Hawk, and Polk.

The Poles were never too numerous. The greatest concentration was in Polk County with 349 in 1920. The same year there were 288 Yugoslavs in Appanoose County. In Woodbury County there was a large settlement of 2,054 Russians in 1920. The counties of Webster, Polk, Pottawattamie, Scott, Cerro Gordo, Black Hawk and Linn all had more than two hundred Russians that same year.

Although most foreigners came from Europe and North America, there were a few from the Far East in Iowa. In 1870 there was a single Chinese family in Marshall County. By 1880 the number had risen to thirty-three in thirteen counties. Nine of these were in Polk County. In 1890 thirty counties had a total of sixty-four Chinese, fourteen of whom were in Sioux City. In 1900 there was only one Japanese in Poweshiek County, but by 1910 the number had increased to twenty-nine. There were 104 Chinese in Iowa that same year.

Most nationality groups followed a pattern in emigrating from their home countries and pro-



ceeding to areas where others speaking the same language and having the same social customs were already established. However, there have been a number of isolated cases in Iowa's nineteenth century history that are hard to explain. Mention of some of them will help to illustrate why Iowa has truly been a melting pot for people from all over the world.

For instance, there was Rosa Mix of Butler County, who was born in Venezuela and lived in Illinois and Wisconsin before coming to Iowa with her husband in the 1850's. In Dubuque in 1860 one could find Abraham Freibley, a day laborer from Ceylon, or in Worth County, Fred Folette, a harness maker who had been born on the Indian Ocean in 1841. Lydia F. Elliott, a music teacher in Benton County in 1870, was born in Hindustan. In Henry County there was another Hindustani, Barney McMahon, photographer.

In Boone County, John and Pauline Baumgart and the four children of George Gasson, were born in Australia although their parents had been born in Prussia. W. D. Horton, a hired man in Hardin County, had come from Tasmania. Solum Toliver, a lawyer in Greene County in 1870, had been born in the East Indies. Java was the birthplace of Mary A. Brown, wife of an English merchant in Cresco. James Smith lived in Buchanan County in 1870. He had been born of Irish parents at the Cape of Good Hope.